

**New study explores the formation of vernacular garden culture in province of Kainuu in northeastern Finland**

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Marjukka Piirainen 2022. *Kansan ja kasvien kasvatusta. Puutarhatieto kainuulaisen pihakulttuurin muutoksessa*. [Cultivation of People and Plants: The Horticultural Knowledge in the Transformation of Domestic Gardens in Kainuu] Dissertations in Education, Humanities, and Theology 189. Joensuu: University of Eastern Finland. 197 pp. ISBN 978-952-61-4671-3 (print) ISBN 978-952-61-4672-0 (PDF) <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-61-4672-0>

In her doctoral dissertation entitled *Kansan ja kasvien kasvatusta. Puutarhatieto kainuulaisen pihakulttuurin muutoksessa* [Cultivation of People and Plants: The Horticultural Knowledge in the Transformation of Domestic Gardens in Kainuu] Marjukka Piirainen examines how horticultural knowledge spread and how home gardens evolved from the late 19th century to the 21st century in province of Kainuu in northeastern Finland, especially the municipality of Kuhmo in the eastern part of the province. The temporal scope of the study is broad, yet its focus on a specific, relatively delimited area enables a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the research subject.

An examination of rural development brings a new perspective to the study of Finnish garden culture, which has thus far been focused on the southern and western parts of the country, particularly on public, communal, and upper-class gardens. Gardening has been practiced in old cultural areas of Finland for hundreds of years, but in Kainuu the garden culture is relatively young as garden plants started to become common only in the early decades of the 20th century. Piirainen's study brings to light the pivotal role of women in remote rural areas in the transformation of local environmental culture, a role that has been largely overlooked in previous research and local histories. Simultaneously, it reveals the 'marginality' of garden culture and draws attention not only to voices but also to silences – the absence of garden discourse in local historiography.

The study is a compilation thesis consisting of an introductory overview and four peer-reviewed research articles published in Finnish periodicals (*Elore*, *J@rgonia*, *Kasvatus & Aika*) and an anthology (*Etnologinen tulkinta ja analyysi* [Ethnological interpretation and analysis], published by Ethnos ry). The article "Puutarhapuhetta ja puheen tulkintaa" [Garden discourse and discourse interpretation] is methodological and reflective in nature. The other three articles – "Kasvutarha – hyötyä, huwitusta ja siiveyden tuntoa" [Garden – utility, pleasure, and sense of virtue], "Ruskoliljoja ja raparperia" [Autumn lilies and rhubarb], and "Perukan tytöstä puutarhayrittäjäksi" [From a village girl to a garden entrepreneur]

neur] – form a chronological sequence from the 1860s to the 2010s, progressing from a national level to a local level and then to an individual level. The main title of the thesis, "Kansan ja kasvien kasvatusta" (Cultivation of People and Plants), juxtaposes the central themes of the study: popular education and changes in domestic environments. Simultaneously, it subtly connects the spread of ornamental plants and new food crops to the construction of the Finnish nation.

Piirainen's research is situated within the perspectives and methodologies of folklore studies and cultural studies. Additionally, she constructs the context of her research through cultural history and, in part, by employing terminology from sociology. Piirainen's study is empirical and qualitative in nature, aiming to both understand and explain the evolution of garden culture and gardening practices in the yards of small-scale farms. The main research methods of the study are content analysis, historical contextualization, and discourse analysis. The reflection on the researcher's own professional horticultural knowledge and its utilization within the realm of cultural studies is a distinct characteristic and strength of the work. Regarding the use of interview data, a notable aspect of the study is that one of the key interviewees is the researcher's own mother – Piirainen also intriguingly reflects on how this influences the interviews and the study.

The study is based on a diverse and extensive dataset, which forms a well-founded entity. The principal sources of data for the study include gardening books published between the 1860s and 1930s (40 books), as well as oral history material compiled by the author between 2008 and 2018, generated not only through research interviews but also various gardening-related events. Additionally, the study has utilized interview data produced by others, photographs and drawings, yard plans, press clippings, minutes of local associations, and local histories, as well as other background materials.

In the research, oral history is approached both as autobiographical narrative constructing personal history and as a source of information about the past. However, it is noteworthy that the research focus is not directed towards the narrative itself or the way of producing the past through reminiscence, but rather on "the remembered time and the actions and experiences of the narrator's former self in their own time." (35) The issues related to the nature of oral history have been deeply explored in many recent studies, and this reflection would have been welcomed more in this study as well.

Drawing on current ethical recommendations, Piirainen has opted to adhere to a line of anonymity in her research (with the exception of Piirainen's own mother), aiming to protect the informants. However, it would be beneficial to delve deeper into the issues related to anonymization from alternative perspectives, such as considering what anonymization means in terms of interviewees' agency, as well as the implications of the absence of personal names and loca-

tions in a study focused largely on describing the development of a single locality, with the goal of also returning research findings to the local level. An alternative approach could have been justified.

Overall, Piirainen's research complements Finnish garden culture studies in an intriguing manner. The study reveals both deliberate popular education efforts and multifaceted interpersonal networks behind the spread of garden plants and horticultural knowledge. The analysis in the study explores the reasons for both the perceived slowness of changes and the adoption and breakthrough of innovations. Gardening was promoted in Finland at the turn of the 20th century by various institutions, such as Kansanvalistusseura (The Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation), Suomen Talousseura (The Finnish Economic Society), 6 agricultural societies, and Marttajärjestö (The Martha Association). The study vividly illustrates that the transformation over a hundred years from open yards to gardens, and especially elaborate ornamental gardens created by horticultural enthusiasts, has been great in Kainuu, and that women played a central role in it – including their activities in homes, in occupational tasks in the gardening sector, and as promoters of horticulture in teaching and advisory work. Simultaneously, the study also demonstrates the resource redistribution between genders brought about by the development of garden culture.

Piirainen draws on both Finnish and international research in her study, but the literature heavily emphasizes Finnish research. A broader survey of research on rural garden cultures from around the world, for example, would have provided additional comparative depth and breadth to the study's observations and conclusions. However, by illustrating the formation of vernacular garden culture in Kuhmo, the study sparks curiosity regarding the extent to which similar or divergent developments have occurred in other remote areas in different countries.

## **AUTHOR**

Kati Mikkola works as communications director in the Finnish Literature Society and has a title of docent in folklore studies at the University of Helsinki. She received her doctorate in comparative religion at the University of Turku in 2010. In her research, she specializes in the study of vernacular culture and the views of the national elite. Mikkola has studied vernacular attitudes towards new lifestyles in Finland, nation-building and self-taught folklore collectors, popular perspectives on secularization and transformations in religiosity, and the position of minorities in the archival policies of nationally-oriented archives in 19th and early 20th century Finland.